

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 0323

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SUBJ: ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN BEGINS FOR MARCH LEGISLATIVE AND
MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

1. SUMMARY: THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN WHICH WILL END WITH THE MARCH 14, 1976 LEGISLATIVE AND MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS OFFICIALLY OPENED ON JANUARY 15. THE GOVERNMENT WILL BE REPRESENTED BY THE PARTIDO DE CONCILIACION NACIONAL (PCN) AND THE OPPOSITION BY A COALITION OF THE PARTIDO DEMOCRATA CRISTIANA (PDC) AND TWO SMALL LEFTWING PARTIES, THE MNR AND UDN. OTHER MINOR PARTIES HAVE DROPPED OUT. SQUABBLING BEGAN EVEN BEFORE THE CAMPAIGN STARTED, MOSTLY INVOLVING TECHNICAL DETAILS OF PARTY AND CANDIDATE REGISTRATION, AND THE BIAS OF THE ELECTORAL BOARDS WHICH WILL SUPERVISE THE VOTE. THE CAMPAIGN COULD BE HARD AND NASTY, PRINCIPALLY BECAUSE ITS RESULTS WILL BE INTERPRETED IN TERMS OF EFFECTS ON AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE BIGGER RACE IN MARCH 1977 FOR A NEW PRESIDENT. END SUMMARY.

2. MUNICIPAL AND LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD IN EL SALVADOR ON SUNDAY, MARCH 14, 1976. HELD BIENNIALY THESE ELECTIONS DETERMINE THE COMPOSITION OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND PRINCIPAL OFFICERS FOR EACH OF THE 261 MUNICIPIOS.

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THE ELECTIONS ARE CONDUCTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE ELECTORAL

LAW WHICH IMPOSES A SIXTY DAY MAXIMUM PERIOD WITHIN WHICH THE POLITICAL PARTIES CAN CONDUCT PARTISAN CAMPAIGNS. THE 1976 CAMPAIGN THUS OFFICIALLY OPENED ON JANUARY 15. THIS CABLE GIVES THE OVERALL FRAMEWORK OF THIS YEAR'S ELECTIONS. SUBSEQUENT MESSAGES WILL FILL IN THE DETAILS.

3. THE 1962 CONSTITUTION PLACES RESPONSIBILITY FOR CONDUCTING ELECTIONS IN THE CONSEJO CENTRAL DE ELECCIONES (CCE). THE 3 MAN CONSEJO DEVOLVES AUTHORITY TO SUBORDINATE COUNCILS IN EACH OF THE 14 DEPARTMENTS WHICH HAVE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE MUNICIPAL RACES. THESE DEPARTMENTAL "WATCHDOGS" ARE COMPOSED OF 3 MEMBERS, ALL APPOINTED BY THE PARENT CCE, THEORETICALLY ONE MEMBER FROM THE GOVERNMENT PARTY (PCN), A SECOND FROM THE OPPOSITION UNO COALITION, AND THE LAST A WELL KNOWN "PUBLIC FIGURE". THE FIRST PROCEDURAL HASSLE OF THIS YEAR'S CAMPAIGN INVOLVED OPPOSITION CHARGES THAT THE GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED CCE HAS LOADED THE DEPARTMENTAL COUNCILS 2 TO 1 WITH PCN MEMBERS. THE CCE DENIED THE CHARGE.

4. THE CCE ESTIMATES THAT THERE ARE 1.7 MILLION ELIGIBLE VOTERS, COMPARED WITH 1.2 MILLION FOR THE LAST ELECTIONS IN 1974. THE COUNT IS BASED ON THE NUMBER OF CEDULAS (PERSONAL IDENTITY CARDS) IN CIRCULATION AT THE TIME OF ELECTION. ISSUANCE OF THESE CARDS WAS SUSPENDED ON JANUARY 13 WITH NO NEW CEDULAS TO BE ISSUED UNTIL AFTER THE MARCH 14 COUNT. AS A JUST PASSED (10/21/75) AMENDMENT TO THE ELECTORAL CODE, THERE ARE 54 ASSEMBLY VACANCIES TO FILL, AN INCREASE OF TWO FOR THE PRESENT 52 MEMBER BODY. THE INCREASE RESULTED FROM A NEW RATIO OF ONE LEGISLATOR PER 70,000 POPULATION, REPLACING THE PREVIOUS RATIO OF ONE PER 50,000. THE TWO NEW SEATS WILL REPRESENT THE DEPARTMENT OF SAN SALVADOR, WHICH ALREADY HAS 9 OF THE 52. THE OTHER DEPARTMENTS MAINTAIN THEIR PRESENT DELEGATE NUMBERS.

5. THIS CAMPAIGN WILL DIFFER FROM 1974 IN ANOTHER WAY- THE RACE WILL INVOLVE ONLY THE TWO MAJOR VOTING BLOCS, WITH NONE OF THE MINOR PARTIES - PPS, FUDI, OR POP - FIELDING CANDIDATES. THE GOVERNMENT PCN AND THE UNO OPPOSITION COALITION BOTH PLAN TO HAVE CANDIDATES FOR EVERY OFFICE. THE ONLY ISSUE INVOLVING THE NUMBER OF PARTIES CONCERNED WHETHER OR NOT THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY (PDC) WOULD, AS IT DID IN 1974, JOIN IN COALITION

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WITH THE SMALL LEFTWING MNR AND UDN PARTIES. THE THREE DECIDED TO RUN AS A COALITION IN LATE OCTOBER, AND SUBMITTED THE PAPERS FOR THE COALITION'S INSCRIPTION TO THE CCE ON NOVEMBER 12, SIXTEEN DAYS BEFORE THE DEADLINE FOR PARTY REGISTRATION. ON NOV. 19, THE PCN PETITIONED THE CCE TO DISALLOW THE COALITION'S INSCRIPTION ON TECHNICAL GROUNDS, I.E. THAT THE PDC CONVENTION WHICH APPROVED THAT PARTY'S PARTICIPATION IN THE COALITION LACKED PROOF OF A QUORUM. THE CCE DENIED UNO INSCRIPTION ON

NOVEMBER 21. THE PDC HAD TO CALL A NEW CONVENTION AND DRAW UP NEW PAPERS. THESE WERE RESUBMITTED TO THE CCE ON NOVEMBER 27, MAKING THE DEADLINE BY 24 HOURS THE CCE ALLOWED THE LEGALITY OF THE UNO COALITION SOME SIX DAYS LATER.

6. DECEMBER SAY THE PCN AND UNO CANDIDATE LISTS PRODUCED AND ANNOUNCED (THROUGH NEITHER PARTY HAS YET INSCRIBED THEM WITH THE CCE, WHICH MUST BE DONE BY FEBRUARY 12). NEITHER LIST PRODUCED MUCH COMMENT. THE ONLY QUESTION THAT THEY ANSWERED WAS WHETHER EITHER PARTY WOULD LIVE UP TO PUBLISHED PREDICTIONS THAT EACH WOULD HAVE LARGE NUMBERS OF WOMEN CANDIDATES, INCLUDING ASPIRANTS FOR THE MAYORSHIP OF SAN SALVADOR. THE ANSWER WAS THEY WOULDN'T. THE PCN HAS 27 WOMEN OUT OF SOME 300 CONDDATES. THE UNO COALITION HAS A FEW MORE.

7. EARLY JANUARY BROUGHT ANOTHER PRE-CAMPAIGN SQUABBLE, THIS TIME INVOLVING A QUESTION OF LAW. IN 1974 A NUMBER OF UNO CANDIDATES FOR REELECTION TO MAYORSHIPS WERE DECLARED INELIGIBLE FOR OFFICE, AFTER THE VOTE, ON THE GROUNDS THAT THEY HAD NOT RESIGNED THEIR OFFICIAL POSITIONS 60 DAYS PRIOR TO ELECTION DAY, AS THE ELECTORAL LAW SEEMS TO REQUIRE OF ALL CANDIDATES. ON JANUARY 1, 1976, THE UNO REQUESTED "CLARIFICATION" OF THIS PROVISIO BY THE CCE. UNO STATED THAT THE 1974 RULINGS HAD BEEN ENFORCED AGAINST UNO MAYORALITY CANDIDATES, BUT NOT AGAINST PCN ASSEMBLYMEN. THE UNO PETITION STATED IT DID NOT WANT TO RUN "FUTILE" CANDIDATES, WHO MIGHT BE DELARED EX POST FACTO TO HAVE BEEN INELIGIBLE, AND THUS WANTED TO KNOW IF ITS CANDIDATES PRESENTLY IN OFFICE HAD TO RENOUNCE THEIR POSITIONS OR NOT. ON JANUARY 7, THE CCE REPLIED THAT, SINCE IT WAS NOT A JURIDICAL BODY, IT COULD NOT ADDRESS ITSELF TO SUCH A REQUEST, WHICH COULD ONLY BE SETTLED BY A COURT, IF ASKED, ON A CASE BY CASE BASIS. THE UNO RESUBMITTED ITS REQUEST ON JANUARY 10, CLAIMING THAT THE CCE, WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR CONFIDENTIAL

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INSCRIBING CANDIDATES AND ENFORCING THE RULES OF ELIGIBILITY, MUST BE THE BODY THAT GIVES SUCH ADVICE, AND IT MUST DO SO PRIOR TO INSCRIPTION OF THE CANDIDATES TO AVOID THE FURSTRATIONS OF UNPRODUCTIVE EFFORTS, AND THE IMPRESSION OF POLITICAL TAMPERING AFTER THE VOTE IS CAST. THE CCE HAS NOT REPLIED TO THIS SECOND REQUEST, BUT, JUST TO BE SURE, A NUMBER OF UNO OFFICE HOLDERS, INCLUDING THE MAYOR OF SAN SALVADOR, HAVE OFFICIALLY TURNED THEIR JOBS OVER TO DEPUTIES.

8. COMMENT: THE PRELIMINARIES ARE OVER, THE FINALS HAVE BEGUN. THE NEXT 60 DAYS ARE EXPECTED TO PRODUCE A HARD, POSSIBLY NASTY, CAMPAIGN. THERE IS NOT DOUBT THAT WHAT HAPPENS THIS TIME WILL HAVE IMPACT ON THE BIGGER STAKES RACE OF MARCH 1977 FOR THE PRESIDENCY. IF THE PCN HAS SLIPPED IN ITS BASE OF SUPPORT AS BADLY AS SOME OBSERVERS BELIEVE (SEE A-108), AND THIS IS

MADE EVIDENT BY THIS CAMPAIGN AND VOTE, THE REGIME MIGHT BEGIN
WORKING ON AN "OPTIONS" STRATEGY PAPER FOR THE ELCTIONS
SCHEDULED IN 1977 AND 1978.
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